

Towards a better future for care

IMPACT REPORT
NOV 2021–APR 2025
SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

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Explore the Centre for Care's research and impact

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This interactive report highlights a selection of the achievements, policy influence and impact catalysed by the Centre's activities and research contributions during phase 1 (2021–25). It presents plans for phase 2 (2025–28), including how the Centre will continue to fill critical gaps in knowledge, push boundaries, build research capacity, create new data infrastructure and make a difference in people's lives.



To learn more about all of our work, visit our [website](#).



Foreword by Wendy Chamberlain, Member of Parliament for North East Fife



It is a privilege to introduce this pivotal report, which shines a light on the essential work being carried out by the Centre for Care.

Care touches all of our lives. At some point we will all need care ourselves, and many of us will also care for others. Care is not merely an issue for policymakers; it is a fundamental pillar of a productive, and compassionate society.

Since their launch in 2021, the Centre for Care has produced rigorous and accessible research on the issues related to care that really matter. Their commitment to co-producing work with those who draw on and provide care has ensured that lived experience sits at the heart of

their findings. The Centre's forward-thinking and outward-looking approach is exactly what is needed to influence the building of a more resilient and equitable care ecosystem for generations to come.

In my own role as an MP campaigning for carers' rights, I have drawn extensively on Centre for Care's research. The Centre's approach, grounded in partnerships with policy and practice experts and lived-experience voices, has consistently demonstrated the urgent need to support unpaid carers and those they care for. I am proud to have sponsored the Carer's Leave Bill which passed into law in 2023, a milestone that grants unpaid carers the statutory right to take up to five days of unpaid leave from work each year. The rigorous academic research from the Centre for Care was instrumental in demonstrating the need for this crucial support.

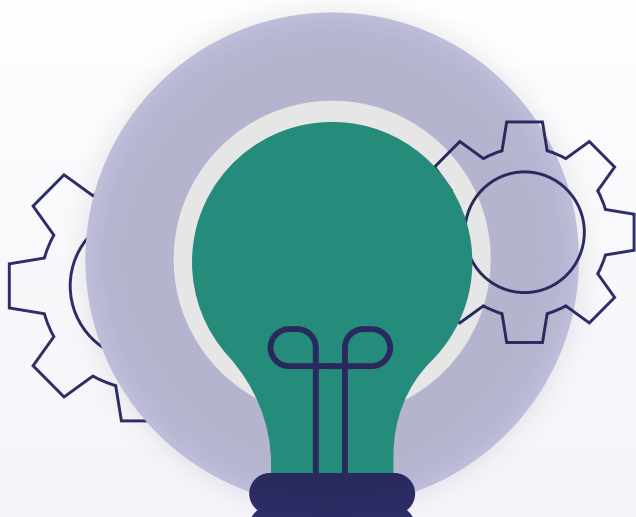
I encourage everyone who reads this report to consider its contents as a call to action. Let us use this knowledge to inform our decisions, inspire innovation, and work together to ensure that every person receives the dignified and comprehensive care they deserve.

Centre for Care:

- is an interdisciplinary research centre providing accessible evidence on care that could improve the lives of millions of people by guiding decision-making, policy and practice in care
- is a collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield, Birmingham, Kent and Oxford, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the Office for National Statistics, Carers UK, the National Children's Bureau and the Social Care Institute for Excellence
- was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at the end of 2021 for its initial five years to address the need for evidence on care that can make a difference, with contributions from the Department of Health and Social Care's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and partner universities to support the Centre's growth and activities



Our mission and objectives



Care is the support we all need over our lifecourse to live well, to access life chances and be included in society. Almost everyone gives and receives care at some point in their lifetime. Doing so should not leave anyone at a disadvantage.

The Centre for Care co-produces accessible, impactful and original research, generating new knowledge that policymakers, commissioners and practitioners can use to improve policy, practice and the experience of care and caring, exploring:

- care across the lifecourse
- paid and unpaid care
- care systems
- policy and practice
- issues of inequalities, diversity and sustainability in care

- **Working together to understand care**
We work directly with people who receive care and support, unpaid carers, care workers, and key partners to develop new understandings of care and caring
- **Producing rigorous research on care**
We bring together experts from many fields to advance understandings of how inequality and diversity affect care, the contributions of paid and unpaid carers, and ways to make care fairer and more sustainable
- **Harnessing data to get answers**
We connect already available data in new ways to fill gaps in knowledge. We ensure this data is easy for policymakers, practitioners and other researchers to access so it can be used to create change and improve services
- **Investing in future care experts**
We provide a dedicated programme of skills training and support for PhD students and new researchers, while also helping those who are more experienced become leaders in care research
- **Sharing knowledge and spark conversation**
We promote dialogue and knowledge exchange on challenges in care through our programme of online/media and knowledge exchange activities that translate research into practice, working with care sector partners to inform the public about care and promote meaningful debate

Our evidence and data matters more than ever.

- There is a growing demand for care, as our population ages and more people are living with complex conditions – insights can build systems and inform policy and practice to ensure care is equitable and sustainable
- Needing or providing care should not, but often does, create inequalities and unfairness – we need better understanding of why some groups are more likely to experience inequalities
- There is a consensus that adult social care is in desperate need of reform, with an independent commission chaired by Baroness Casey producing a plan to deliver a “National Care Service” – change should be informed by evidence
- Care spans many areas of policy, beyond Children’s and Adult Social Care – it underpins the government’s 10 Year Health Plan for England and its proposals for a preventative “Neighbourhood Health Service” and new transparency of the quality of care



Centre at a glance (2021–2025)

15 academic co-investigators

16 researchers

6 policy and practice Co-Investigators

6 operations staff

36 linked PhD students

54 commentaries

37 evidence submissions

10 international partnerships

11 original research articles

8 research reports

5 working papers

4 books and book chapters

11 research seminars

36 podcast episodes of Care Matters,
with 4,700+ downloads

£800k+ of additional funding
leveraged or secured for the Centre
and our university partners



Voice Forum includes people with lived experience of receiving and/or giving care and support. It meets several times a year to discuss Centre-wide impact activities and any topics it brings forward and review documentation.

Policy and Practice partners guide the Centre's development, assist with research and data access, and support the research team in achieving our capacity building and impact aims; working with partners facilitates the implementation of our recommendations.

We organise our research around three research groups and four themes

Care trajectories and constraints

explores experiences of care at different life stages, as people transition between parts of the care system, and how care is affected when families are geographically dispersed.

Inequalities in care

uses statistical, data linkage and qualitative techniques to learn how socio-economic, health and other inequalities shape experiences of care, and the consequences of these for groups and individuals in different places and over time.

Care workforce change

focuses on the impact of systemic 'shocks', the implications of innovation and how the care workforce has responded to or driven change.

Care as a complex adaptive ecosystem

examines the complex and interlinked nature of care systems.

Digital care

addresses how digital technology, care and caring relationships intersect and interact.

Care data infrastructure

is focused on improving the quality, availability, and provision of social care data for the public, policymakers and practitioners, and research communities.

Children and families

considers the breadth of services that constitute children's social care, as well as wider experiences of care and caring.



Advancing theory

The idea that theory matters is foundational to the Centre for Care. Theory provides the essential architecture for organising knowledge, explaining phenomena and guiding effective policy and practice.

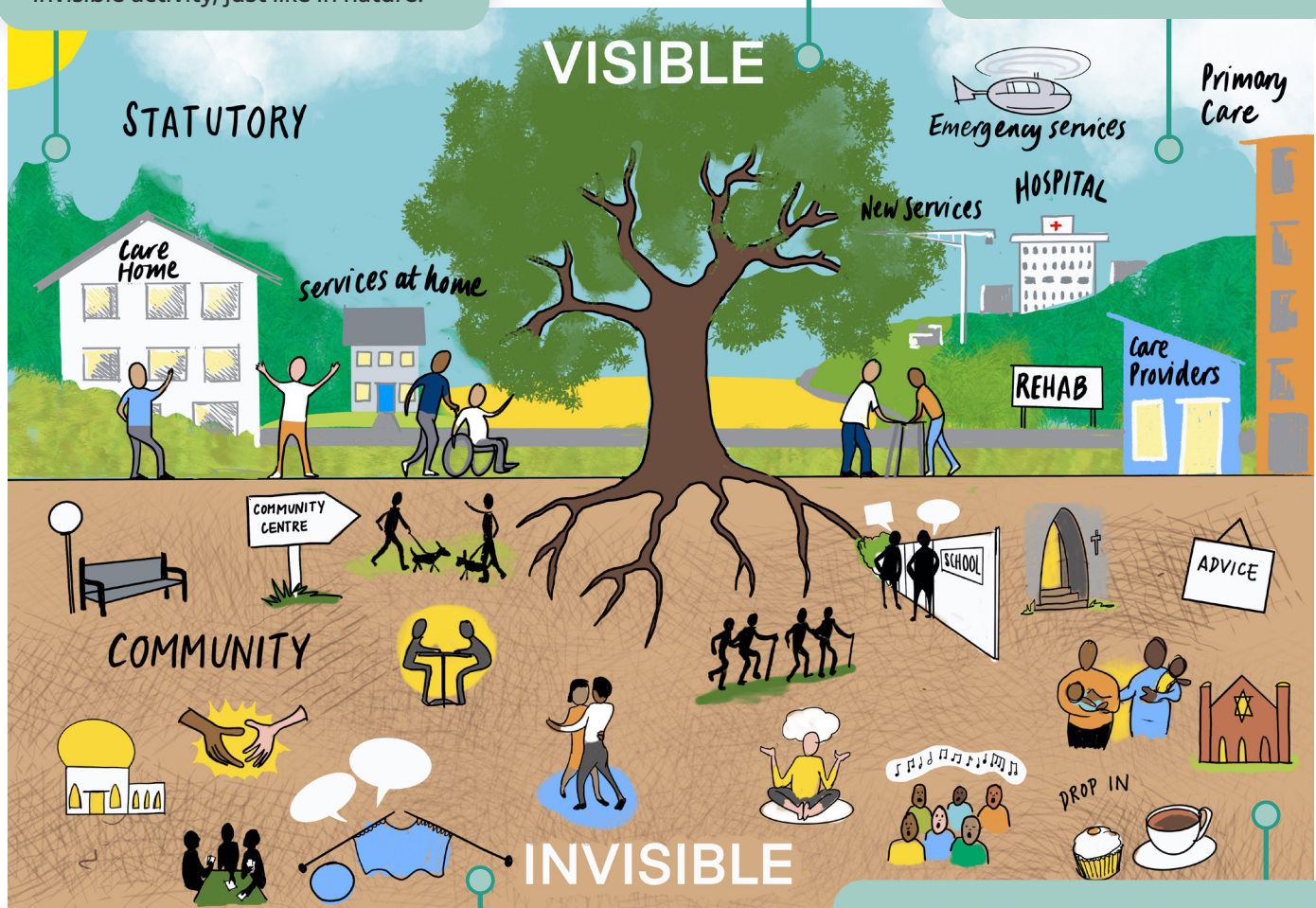
The Centre organises six *Theory Building Workshops* each year. These develop new understanding of core concepts, identify theoretical and methodological gaps and develop new theory that is empirically-grounded and policy relevant.

Care as a complex, adaptive ecosystem

The *Care as a Complex, Adaptive Ecosystem* research theme co-created a visual representation of a flourishing social care ecosystem, drawn by artist [Laura Brodrick](#). It's developed from the idea that a flourishing system has visible and invisible activity, just like in nature.

Care homes, services at home and hospitals are some of the visible parts of the system.

We need both the visible and the invisible for a flourishing care ecosystem. When one part isn't working well it overloads the other, resulting in a degraded ecosystem, like a barren landscape.



The invisible parts are all the small community activities which aren't necessarily thought of as part of social care but are like microorganisms that make the soil rich and fertile. These are the coffee mornings, choirs, sports clubs, dance groups, faith organisations, family and neighbourhood networks which help people to have purpose and meaning.

In our research, we look at what characteristics lead to flourishing local care ecosystems. We explore whether the features of some local systems make them more likely to be degraded and failing, and how they can be supported to flourish.



Methodological innovation

Just as we aim to make advances in theory, we also strive to develop better and more complete ways to enhance our understanding of care and caring.

We hold six *Methods Sessions* every year to share our work and engage with external speakers. These sessions have helped us to develop and refine our methods and approaches. Here are some examples of innovative methods developed by the Centre for Care team during phase 1.

New application of method to study the impact of life events like becoming an unpaid carer



Unpaid carers provide the majority of support for people living with challenges related to older age, long-term illness, or disability. However, the care they provide often results in a significant income penalty. We have developed an innovative approach that allows us to examine the impact of becoming an unpaid carer on people's finances and other life chances (such as health, happiness and social relationships). The Individual Synthetic Control approach:

- creates "synthetic doppelgängers"— digital twins who didn't become a carer
- allows us to estimate the causal impact of unpaid caring on individual incomes, highlighting that when all other things are equal, caring always results in a lower income
- provides long-term estimates for how this income penalty builds over many years (the cumulative impact)
- allows us to explore how these costs differ for people from various backgrounds (the intersectional inequalities)

In line with Open Research principles, we have created packages that allow people to freely use our new methods for their work in other research areas.

We find an average relative income gap of up to 45% between unpaid carers and their synthetic counterparts



Linking data to understand how the context of care impacts on experiences and life chances



We have completed several longitudinal studies that make **important theoretical and methodological contributions** to our understanding of care by linking household members (to create dyads – pairs of caring and cared-for people), linking people to where they live, and following them over time. This enables us to:

- understand how relationships between unpaid carers and the people they care for impact on health, happiness and unmet need in different ways over time
- explore the role of structural factors, such as area deprivation and social care provision, on different types of support to learn how we might improve provision



Bridging data gaps

There are currently major gaps in the available data about care across the UK. To address this, the Centre for Care is focused on making care data more comprehensive and accessible and this section offers a few examples of how we do this.

We are building new tools and platforms based on Open Science principles – meaning we share our work openly. For example, we publish the data “recipes” (called metadata and replication files) for many of our studies on our [GitHub page](#). Our *Care Data Infrastructure* team collaborates with colleagues across the Centre, and with the ONS, to improve analytical capacity in care research; this work has consolidated our ‘[Valuing Carers](#)’ series. The team is also working on the development of a national Survey of Carers with government departments and the ONS.

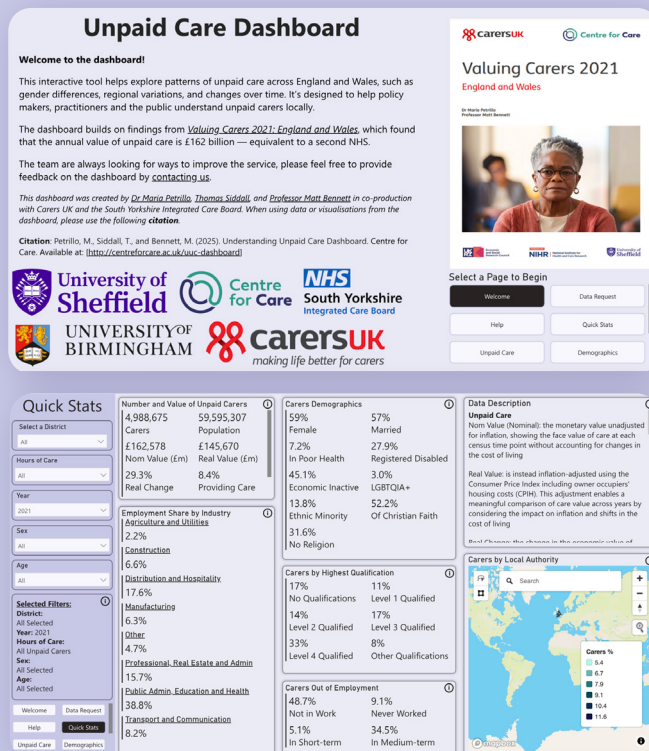
The Unpaid Care Dashboard, a co-created tool to unlock data and ignite change



Unpaid carers provide care for family members, friends, and neighbours in need of support due to long-term illness, disability or older age. There are 5.8 million unpaid carers in the UK, with our research valuing the care they provide at £184.3 billion – equivalent to a second NHS. Most of us will become unpaid carers at some point in our lives, often combining other work and responsibilities with caring roles.

The [Unpaid Care Dashboard](#) is an interactive tool bringing together data from the 2011 and 2021 England and Wales Censuses, building on findings from our report, [Valuing Care 2021: England and Wales](#). It allows users to **explore data** and create graphs and reports, enabling them to:

- see which groups of people are providing unpaid care within local authorities, and compare this with other places in England and Wales
- see how unpaid carers as a group have changed over time – for example, how much care they provide, whether their health is better or worse, and which types of jobs they do
- combine data for multiple local authorities that make up different geographical or administrative areas such as an Integrated Care Board
- understand how resources or services might be changed to support local populations, and to support the development of business cases.



Co-creating the Unpaid Care Dashboard

We worked in partnership with Carers UK, the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, people with lived experience of care, and the ONS to co-create the dashboard. We held co-design workshops, bringing together service providers, commissioners, unpaid carers organisations and people with lived experience of care and support. This approach ensured the dashboard addressed everyone's expectations, priorities and goals. The dashboard is also screen reader compatible to increase accessibility.

Our aim was to develop a freely accessible, inclusive and interactive resource that anyone could use to understand and explore unpaid care. This includes a wide range of people from different backgrounds and with diverse abilities, including the general public, unpaid carers, and people with responsibilities for social care services.

The dashboard has reached numerous local authorities and unpaid carer support providers and has allowed them to access key data on unpaid carers in ways that are easy to analyse and interpret, allowing services to adjust and tailor support to the needs of their community.

Making ONS data available to the public

To develop the dashboard, we commissioned new data tables on unpaid care from the ONS. These were previously not available to the general public. They include breakdowns of unpaid care provision by age, sex, long-term health problem or disability, highest level of qualification, ethnic group, economic activity, general health, employment history, religion, industry of employment, and marital status.

Feedback from dashboard users and impact

"What a fantastic resource and very much needed."

"An absolute goldmine of information. If you work in social care or work with carers – do yourself a big favour and go and check the dashboard out."

"Being involved in the testing of the Unpaid Care Dashboard has been both valuable and rewarding. It's a powerful tool that makes local data about carers accessible and clear, particularly around aspects like ethnicity and economic activity. I'm pleased to see how our feedback from the workshops has shaped a resource that will support better understanding and action of unpaid carers."

The Unpaid Care Dashboard was [endorsed in an Early Day Motion](#) by Alison Bennett MP and won the University of Sheffield's 'Outstanding partnership or impact in policy, public services, and law' award in 2024/5.

Making research easier to understand



When researchers analyse data, they often need to make many small, subjective decisions such as which factors to include or how to represent relationships. These choices can significantly change the outcome of the study. [RobustiPy](#), a new, free software tool we have co-developed with the Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science, helps researchers see how their choices affect their study results while building their models.

RobustiPy users can rapidly test thousands or even millions of different model setups. It has built-in features that help with bootstrapping, model selection, out-of-sample validation and variable importance. Researchers can make their work more transparent, reliable, and easier to understand by using the tool. It helps ensure that the conclusions drawn from a study are solid and don't depend on one specific set of choices.



Influencing policy change

All of the Centre's research is underpinned by the aim that it must **make a real-world difference**, and that often starts with changing policy.

Our approach to creating policy change includes **responding** to calls for evidence, government and All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiries; and engaging **proactively** with government, relevant departments and committees, civil servants, local government and organisations who are also advocating for change. Here are some examples from our phase 1 work.

Bringing together lived experience, practitioner insights and research evidence on migration and poverty

[Stand As One](#) (SAO) supports disadvantaged refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants to avoid homelessness and extreme poverty, access vital services, increase their employability and live independently.

We facilitated focus group sessions with SAO to understand lived experiences and ensure these were included in a collaborative response to the inquiry by the APPGs for Poverty and for Migration into whether and how immigration and asylum policies are contributing to poverty in the UK.

The [inquiry report](#) included recommendations to reduce the impacts of immigration policy on poverty. People who had participated in the focus group and Centre for Care researchers attended the report's Westminster launch and met with Olivia Blake MP, Chair of the APPG on Migration, and Baroness Ruth Lister.

Collaboration to shape policy and support for unpaid carers

In collaboration with Centre for Care Policy and Practice Co-Investigator Carers UK, we have produced a series of influential publications on unpaid carers, including the [Valuing Carers](#) series which has calculated the value of unpaid care to the UK care system. This innovative and rigorous research influenced legislation that underpins unpaid carers entitlements, most notably the [Carer's Leave Act 2024](#), giving unpaid carers the legal right to take up to five days (unpaid) leave from work to care.

Centre for Care work was included in the Private Member's Bill first introduced by MP Wendy Chamberlain in 2022, and in evidence submissions during the consultation period, the Government Impact Assessment and many parliamentary debates. In acknowledgment of our contribution to the evidence regarding inequalities unpaid carers face, the research team were invited to the House of Lords to celebrate the passing of the Carer's Leave Act into law in July 2023.

Response to consultation on the NHS 10 Year Plan

This consultation ran from 2024-2025. Our response emphasised the importance of partnership between social care, health and other agencies; and called for greater support for unpaid carers. We highlighted the need to substantially improve pay and working conditions in the social care sector, and for a co-produced National Carers Strategy, backed by resources to action it.

We called for a sustainable funding settlement for adult social care that recognises its role beyond providing ancillary services to the NHS; a holistic approach on prevention; and a focus on the role of culture, systems and processes in achieving policy goals such as integration and personalised care. We highlighted the need to understand the conditions in which digital technologies can enhance wellbeing and inclusion, and increase efficiency.



We have contributed to **37 national level official calls for evidence**, including 16 parliamentary select committee inquiries, three calls from APPGs, and 12 consultations from the UK's national and devolved governments and arms-length bodies such as NHS England and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Colleagues have also participated in **seven oral evidence sessions** on issues related to care and caring. Here are some examples from phase 1.

The House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into Adult Social Care Reform: The Cost of Inaction

Centre for Care's written evidence explored how the current system fails some people who draw on care and support and unpaid carers, as well as the increasing pressures faced by community organisations and the wider ecosystem of care.

We highlighted our research in partnership with Carers UK that values the economic contribution of unpaid carers in the UK at £184.3 billion per year – equivalent to a second NHS.

Centre researcher Maria Petrillo was invited to present our work on the 'Costs of caring', which demonstrated the income penalty unpaid carers experience.

Our evidence submission also examined the reflections of carers from migrant and racially minoritised communities, where care across distance and previous experiences of institutionalised racism make receiving formal care support challenging.

We highlighted the need for reform to improve the pay and conditions for care workers as an integral step in addressing the recruitment and retention crisis in the care sector.

The Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee post-legislative inquiry into the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013

A written response from Catherine Needham, Emily Burn and Centre for Care Associate Patrick Hall explored the tensions between the Scottish policy of free personal care and self-directed support (SDS) and discussed some of the barriers people face to accessing the full range of SDS options.

The Northern Irish government's consultation on The 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill

Kate Hamblin shared learning from international evidence on paid carer's leave. Duncan Fisher and Liam Foster shared findings from their fieldwork exploring trade union organising.

The Scottish Parliament's Stage 2 scrutiny of the National Care Service Bill

Catherine Needham and Emily Burn drew on findings from a collaborative project with the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), which emphasised the importance of local areas being able to develop services which respond to community needs.

 See more [responses to inquiries and calls for evidence](#)



Impact on care practice

How care providers, workers and other practitioner audiences use the Centre's research

The contributions we make to care theory, research and policy go hand in hand with facilitating changes in care practice which benefit people who give and receive care. We build effective and mutually-beneficial working relationships in service of our commitment to co-production and achieving impact. These examples demonstrate some of our achievements during phase 1.

Working with community stakeholders

ADULT PARTNERSHIP BOARD

The [Adult Partnership Board](#) (now known as the Sheffield Adult Care Collaborative Group) is a collaboration with Sheffield City Council, the voluntary and third sector, care providers, health organisations, and the Centre for Care. Its mission is to forge a unified voice for the care sector in Sheffield, understand how collective action can drive meaningful change, and identify concrete steps for progress. The Board has welcomed presentations from the Centre for Care on numerous topics including the care workforce, unpaid carers and prevention. The board has now entered an 'action phase' to activate change fuelled by research and practical expertise aligning together.



The Centre for Care has played a pivotal role in developing and establishing the Adult Partnership Board, now known as the Sheffield Adult Care Collaborative Group. Through strategic oversight that bridges research and local practice in Sheffield, they have brought together sector expertise to share best practices, knowledge, and challenges. This collaborative space has empowered stakeholders to generate ideas, explore opportunities and innovation, and design practical solutions for adult social care in Sheffield.

We view this as a crucial step in driving positive change in Sheffield. The Care Collaborative Group is integral to our plans, aligning with our Adult Social Care Strategy, 'living the life that you want to live'. This group is also closely connected with our workforce development activities as part of the Sheffield Health and Care Workforce Engagement Board and the Sheffield Care Sector Workforce Development Strategy.

I am genuinely excited about the future developments of the group and the significant impact that this will have on the health and care sector in Sheffield. The collaborative efforts and innovative solutions we are fostering today will lead to a brighter and more sustainable future for adult social care in Sheffield."

– John Chamberlain, Adult Care and Wellbeing Service, Sheffield City Council

CARE ACADEMY

We also work with Sheffield City Council's [Care Academy](#) to identify and address support needs in the care workforce. During the development phase of the Care Academy, Sheffield City Council conducted consultation workshops to ensure the design, implementation and delivery was fit for purpose.

Centre for Care researchers contributed research findings around the care workforce, care worker organising, digital tech and the workforce. This allowed research to be shared for practical implementation purposes; the Academy showcased the success of this collaboration at its 2024 launch event. We attend a quarterly meeting to ensure continual development of the Care Academy.

Practical solutions to care sector challenges

DIGITAL SKILLS FOR CARE WORKERS

Our research explores how digital technology, care and caring relationships intersect and interact. We have identified some concerns about a 'digital divide' amongst the care workers in terms of their familiarity with technologies, including mainstream devices, but also digital creativity and skills across the workforce, developed in an understaffed and overworked context. Care workers are often grappling with technologies that have not been designed in ways to ensure they are user-friendly or well-suited to the realities of care work.

We have shared our findings at events with care providers, managers and workers, and other professionals working in the care sector, including commissioners, social workers and occupational therapists. This has allowed the Centre for Care to establish strong partnerships with those working in the sector and facilitate ongoing relationships and opportunities for research to be shared to enable real practice impact.

FUNDING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND IMPACT ACTIVITIES

The Centre for Care **Impact Fund** is available to all team members to support knowledge exchange and impact activities. It has supported work including:

- producing training material to support job quality in homecare (combining research outcomes from the [Sustainable Care Programme](#) and the Centre for Care)
- roundtable discussions and a subsequent [report](#) on improving justice outcomes for children involved in child protection, evidencing good practice examples
- the production of the 'Mind the Gap' board game ([page 14](#))

MECHANISMS TO ENABLE SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS AN UNPAID CARER

Many unpaid carers do not recognise themselves as carers and are not identified as such by organisations and institutions. This can lead to:

- 'paying to care', as they have not undergone the Carers' Assessment which allows for recognition as a registered carer
- loneliness or social isolation with a negative impact on their health and wellbeing
- mounting financial pressures

Yet, their role is increasingly important for the social and economic sustainability of the welfare system and their contribution to society is far bigger than the help they receive. Our work is investigating mechanisms to enable self-identification.

'DON'T KNOW' – SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT

With a particular focus on supporting young carers to self-identify, we have undertaken a scoping project to explore how organisations including education providers, councils and the NHS identify young adult carers.

We want to give young adults opportunities to declare if they are uncertain about their identification as an unpaid carer. We call this the 'don't know option'. It could initiate discussions and access to relevant interventions. This may assist young carers and young adult carers to be supported in a range of settings and fulfil their potential and aspirations.

Enhancing public understandings of care

We believe a society that truly comprehends the scope of care will be more compassionate and better equipped to tackle inequalities and inequities to ensure we can all live well and flourish. We therefore want to ensure our research reaches and engages people and inspires positive change.

Mind the Gap board game examines digital exclusion in care

A [board game](#) developed by the Centre highlights the barriers many people face to access vital information and services online, including social care support.

People can be digitally excluded for a variety of reasons, including issues related to connectivity, costs, accessibility, lack of support and their online confidence, skills and motivation. We know people who are disabled or in poor health, older, on low incomes, from ethnic minority backgrounds, living in rural areas and unpaid carers are more likely to experience digital exclusion and therefore might find accessing care and support online difficult.

Working with our evidence and Think Local Act Personal, we co-created the Mind the Gap: Tackling Digital Exclusion board game in giant and tabletop versions in collaboration with award-winning artist Paul Evans for the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2024. We also developed a version in collaboration with Carers UK that focuses on the barriers unpaid carers face in our society, called Mind the Gap: Tackling Inequalities for Unpaid Carers.

Both versions of the interactive game invite participants to take on a new persona and learn more about the inequalities they face, either as a carer or someone who might be experiencing digital exclusion for a variety of reasons. Each persona is different in terms of the attributes



that will help and hinder their progress. As players travel through the game, they draw 'barrier' and 'chance' cards, each one revealing the real-world inequalities and obstacles that people face every day. Mind the Gap isn't just a game: it's a powerful journey to understand someone else's resilience and the hidden struggles they encounter.

Both board games have been 'on tour' and taken to various conferences and meetings, including the Commissioners Conference, Carers UK's Member's conference and to the DHSC Strategy and reform directorate. During Carers Week in June 2025, Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Alison Bennett MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Care and Carers, met unpaid carers at Greenwich Carers Centre to participate in the game. Carers shared their stories and discussed the systemic changes needed to improve carers' lives.



Carers across the country do an extraordinary job looking after family members and loved ones. Our society simply could not function without them. They are the backbone of our social care system and the NHS. Too often, care and carers are put in the "too hard" basket by the government and so much of the media – and we need to change that. So congratulations to the Centre for Care on finding a way to bring the ups and downs of caring to light with this game. It has real potential to influence both policy and practice for the better."

– Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Media coverage

The Centre is regularly invited to offer commentary and interviewees to the media. During the past three years our research has been covered extensively:

- by **television and radio** including the BBC, Sky, Channel Five, LBC News, Times Radio, Magic FM, the Global Radio network (Capital FM, Smooth Radio and Gold Radio) and many BBC local radio stations
- in **national print and online media** including The Independent, The Voice, The Guardian, The Times, The Conversation, The Express, The Mirror, BBC Online, Parliament Live, Senedd TV, The British Medical Journal and HR Magazine
- in numerous **regional press** articles

Making kinship carers' £4.3bn contribution to society understood and valued

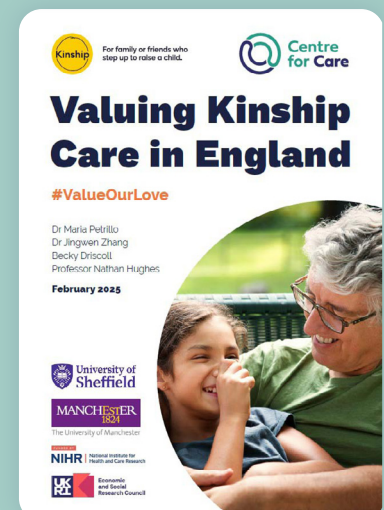


Kinship carers look after children who would often otherwise be in the care system. '[Valuing Kinship Care in England](#)' is our 2025 report in collaboration with the charity Kinship on the huge and under-recognised contribution which kinship carers make to society.

Our research estimates that kinship carers contribute £4.3 billion a year to society. Despite the high value of care provided by families and friends, most don't have access to the same financial, practical and emotional support that is available for foster carers.

The £4.3bn value of kinship care is equivalent to nearly 40% of the entire children's services budget for England – without it, child protection and welfare systems would not be able to cope with the rise in demand for children requiring alternative forms of care.

This report elevated public understanding, becoming a key reference point in media and policy debate and shifting the narrative on kinship care, from hidden, informal support to a recognised pillar of the children's social care system deserving proper support. The extensive media coverage it generated supported our aim to make carers visible in decision-making.



Communications and events

We keep our [website](#) updated with regular commentaries about care and our research, including academic publications, podcasts, videos and other outputs. The site receives between 300–500 new and regular visitors each month, and consistently over 1,000 page views each month.

Pages on the website have been viewed 47,000 times by 10,000 users since the site was launched, with 1,500 downloads of documents. Our published commentaries have been read over 2,000 times.

We use our social media accounts on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#) and [Bluesky](#) for bilateral communication with care practitioners, policymakers, carers and people who use care. These channels provide two-way communication, enabling us to disseminate research, engage with and involve stakeholders, and direct people to our website content. Our LinkedIn account has been our fastest growing in terms of followers and engagement; in April 2025 we had almost 700 followers on this platform and the numbers continue to rise on a weekly basis. Our videos on Youtube have been viewed over 1.8k times.

Our email newsletter, which now has over 900 subscribers, provides updates on outputs and events and we host regular online seminars in which colleagues, partners and experts present research.



Building capacity

The Centre for Care is committed to enhancing and building major new capacity in research on care across academia and the wider care sector.

Our research groups and cross-cutting themes all contribute to this goal, and here we highlight examples of how we build our own team members' capacity, and enable capacity building with our partners and for care scholars more widely.

CENTRE FOR CARE TEAM

The Centre for Care Capacity Building Fund is available to all team members to support career development, grant or output development, or other activities that build capacity (for the Centre for Care or for individuals).

The fund is open on a continual basis, and applications are considered by the Capacity Building Group. It has supported some of the work already featured in this report and other projects including research visits; fieldwork; co-production to develop a project on residential care; a [paper](#) about Developing Equitable Global Research Partnerships; and continuing development of the Care Dashboard.

The Quantitative Analysis and Research Network for Care (QAR-Net Care) has been supported by the Capacity Building Fund. QAR-Net Care is an innovative initiative designed to address the existing gap in care research by emphasising quantitative methodologies. The Network is a means to foster collaboration and opportunities for feedback on work in progress through workshops and an annual conference.

QAR-Net Care's inaugural workshop took place in June 2024. It included a keynote address by Professor Karen Glaser from King's College London, focusing on the relationship between the care system and inequalities in care. This was followed by 16 presentations covering critical topics, including care needs, unpaid care provision and its impact on health, financial well-being, and employment. The presenters, from universities in the UK, Germany, and Australia, brought diverse perspectives and expertise. The event concluded with a collaborative session.

ETHICAL PARTNERSHIPS

Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association (SADACCA) is actively involved in co-producing our research. Formed in 1955, SADACCA promotes and establishes support for marginalised communities. It provides a socially inclusive community hub with services such as domiciliary care, adult day care, and learning support, alongside sports, arts, and music initiatives.

Unpaid carers, nurses, care workers, social workers, community leaders, and individuals using care services attended an event we and SADACCA co-organised to inform our response to the House of Lords inquiry *Lifting the veil: Removing the invisibility of adult social care*. Discussions covered the invisibility of care, how it relates to socio-economic and cultural background, and how experiences of individuals navigating the social care sector are shaped by racialised norms and racist assumptions.

CARE SCHOLARS

Summer School

This is a week-long residential programme for students whose PhD studies align with the Centre's themes and research. It offers fully-funded places (covering travel, meals and accommodation), some reserved for students who are from and currently undertake their studies in low- and/or middle- income countries.

The first Centre for Care Summer School took place in September 2024 (see image). 10 students from four countries participated and were able to develop their care-focused papers, participate in lectures and workshops, and receive mentorship from the Centre for Care team.



Associates

We launched our Associates programme in 2022. We offer Associates access to Centre for Care workshops, meetings and seminars, as well as the opportunity to present their work at these events, which are valuable opportunities for networking, reflection and making connections.

We also collaborate with Associates on research and outputs, for example on Safeguarding Futures: Reducing the risk of criminal justice involvement for children in contact with the social care system, and on our policy engagement work, for example in our contribution to the UK Parliament POSTnote on Digital disengagement and impacts on exclusion.



Centre for Care is a timely centre delivering high-quality research and developing important capacity including new data infrastructure. Throughout phase 1 the Centre has integrated co-production and impact throughout and is changing the way we think about the care workforce, kinship and unpaid care."

– Economic and Social Research Council



Future plans and opportunities

Phase 2 includes 18 months of ESRC Centre funding (May 2025–Oct 2026) mixed with other, additional funding from this point onward.

During phase 2, the Centre for Care's research groups and cross-cutting themes will largely remain consistent with and build on phase 1. Projects will:

focus on lived experience; care-marginalised groups; rich qualitative methods, with an emphasis on participatory and creative methods; and explorations of inequalities and resistance

produce peer-reviewed academic papers in addition to blogs/commentaries and podcasts; accessible material for policy and practice stakeholders, such as policy briefs; accessible material for the general public

directly address the Centre's objectives related to intersectional and geographical inequalities across the lifecourse for people who need, provide, and receive care

continue to explore changes in the care workforce at multiple levels and their impacts on various actors within the care ecosystem

seek to influence key decisions around care funding and system reform

support local authorities to develop care ecosystems which enhance sustainability and equity

research the likely extent of unmet and undermet need in adult social care across a range of local authorities

explore drivers and barriers to innovation and using digital technologies in care and caring

address inadequacies in social care quantitative data, infrastructure and national statistics

expand the Centre's work in relation to children and young people by establishing a programme of research through the *Children and Families* theme



Reflections from our director, Professor Kate Hamblin



Looking back over the three and a half years since the Centre for Care began, we have made substantial contributions to research on care and caring, exploring a broad range of topics that encompass the whole lifecourse; care systems and other connected policy areas; and the perspectives of those giving and receiving care.

We have achieved this in a way that is ethically-grounded and underpinned by insights from lived experience and practice expertise, focused on the questions that matter. We have also worked to ensure we are harnessing existing data wherever possible, and in turn have made this data more accessible to people with a professional or personal interest in care and caring.

As an ESRC and NIHR-funded Centre, our contributions to theory and new methods are integral in how we approach understanding care and caring, as is a focus on driving forward real-world change and public debate. Capacity building – of care scholars at all levels within academia, and organisations and people across the care sector – has also been at the core of our approach.

What is abundantly clear is that our research is needed more than ever. Care is an issue that impacts all of our lives, and in policy terms continues to be an area facing significant challenges.

As we look ahead, we have developed a range of plans for the remainder of the funded period which include a strong focus on generating new knowledge that is accessible to policymakers, commissioners and practitioners to improve policy, practice and the experience of care and caring.

We will continue to work directly with people who receive and provide care in co-produced research, ensuring that solutions are grounded in lived experience. Simultaneously, we will scale up our work to harness and connect available data, providing policymakers with the robust, accessible evidence needed to drive meaningful legislative change.

We will also renew our commitment to investing in the next generation of care experts, training researchers who can tackle these immense challenges with both rigour and empathy.



The future of care is not about quick solutions; it is about building a foundation that is profoundly, sustainably human, underpinned by cutting-edge insight."





Get in touch

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Please get in touch if you would like to know more, or to work with us on related issues: centreforcure@sheffield.ac.uk

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